

Giving back to get ahead; Summer interns bring conservation ethic to Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

by Julia Nagle



This summer, Student Conservation Association (SCA) interns Samantha Dingfelder, Emily Williams, Eve Smallwood, and Julia Nagle will contribute over 3,000 hours of volunteer service at Kenai National Wildlife Refuge helping visitors and presenting wildlife programs. Credit: Eve Smallwood.

Summer is an ideal time to highlight the work done by volunteer interns at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. Student Conservation Association (SCA) interns contribute to Refuge operations and conservation projects while exploring possible careers in conservation, visitor services, environmental education and the natural sciences.

Emily Williams, Samantha Dingfelder, Eve Smallwood, and I recently arrived as seasonal conservation interns with the national Student Conservation Association (SCA) program. We hail from Titusville, FL, Warsaw, MO, and Springfield, IL, and Pittsburgh, PA, respectively. We provide information about the Kenai NWR to the public at the Refuge's Visitor Center and the Visitor Contact Station, as well as giving natural history campfire talks on weekends, and assisting with various trail maintenance tasks throughout the summer.

As needs outpace budgets on America's public lands, the efforts of SCA volunteers have become essential. Some 50,000 young people have volunteered

through SCA since 1957 at not only national wildlife refuges, but at national and state parks and forests as well. The energy and idealism of the volunteers allows federal and state land-management agencies, as well as non-profit organizations, to meet the needs of the public in ways which wouldn't otherwise be possible.

SCA members learn a "conservation ethic" through their hands-on service, and it benefits both the land and the individual. This experience leads many of them to become lifelong stewards of the land, and 60% of SCA interns go on to successful careers in many areas of conservation. At the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, four permanent staff members got started through the Student Conservation Association Program. These include wildlife biologist Liz Jozwiak, Law Enforcement Ranger Rob Barto, Backcountry Ranger Scott Slavik, and Environmental Education Specialist Michelle Ostrowski.

The Student Conservation Association is dedicated to encouraging a new generation of conservation leaders, advancing the land ethic, and helping to conserve our nation's natural and cultural resources. The organization places nearly 3,000 high school, college and graduate student members in the field each year, and they provide more than 1.5 million hours of conservation service in national parks, forests and other public lands.

I've always wanted to visit Alaska, and SCA provided an ideal opportunity for me to simultaneously experience this incredible wilderness while gaining valuable work skills and giving back to the public through volunteerism. I'd recommend this program for anyone who loves the outdoors and wants to make a difference.

For more information about the Student Conservation Association (SCA), contact Kevin Hamilton at 603.543.1700, x185, or via email at khamilton@theSCA.org, or visit the SCA website: www.thesca.org.

For more information about the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge internship experience, contact Julia Nagle at 412-680-8667 or jnagle37@gmail.com.

Julia Nagle, 24, is a graduate of Columbia Univer-

sity with a degree in urban studies and political science. She plans to pursue graduate work in public policy. This is her second SCA internship. She first got hooked on volunteering for SCA in high school and worked as part

of a high school trail crew. Previous Refuge Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.